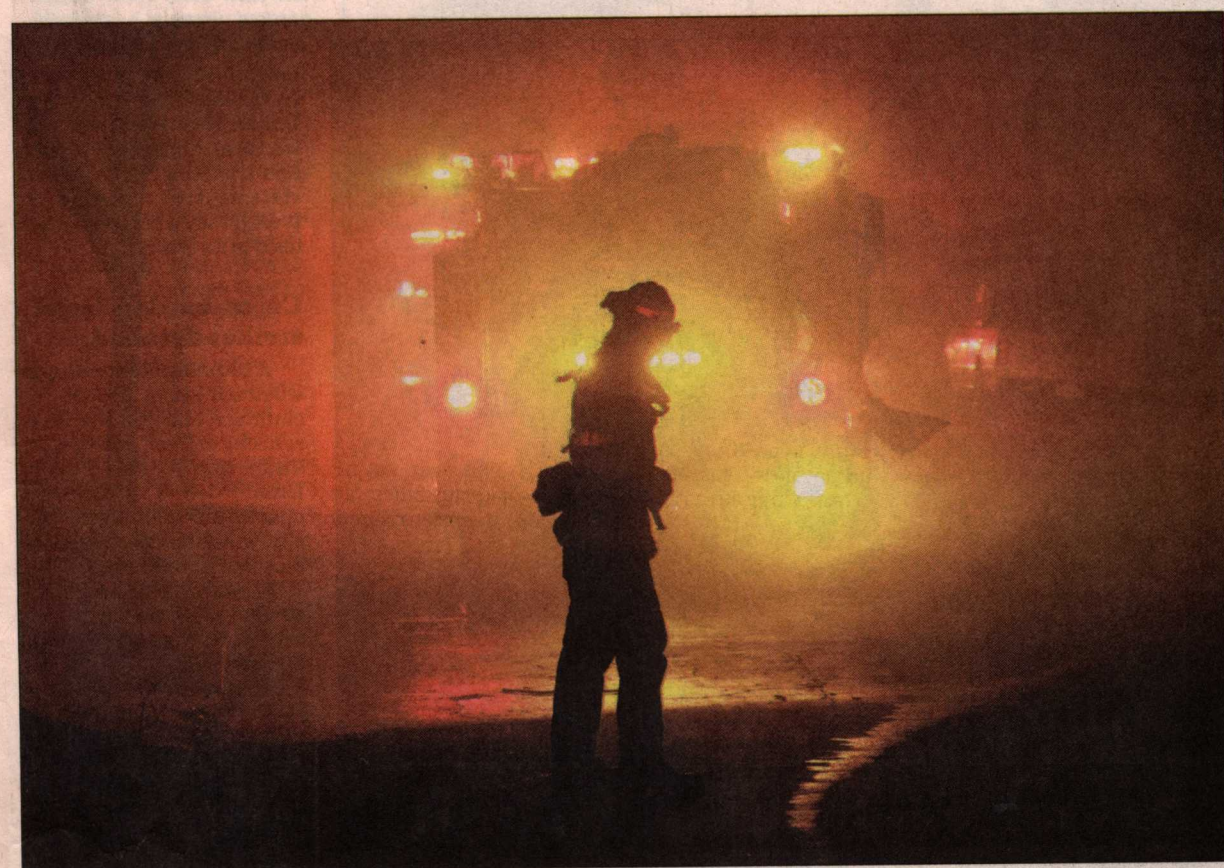




GINA FERAZZI Los Angeles Times

WITH AIRCRAFT grounded in the Eaton fire, officials had to rely on ground observations in heavy smoke.

Altadena fire crews lacked satellite maps

L.A. County did not have access to the common tracking tool that can save lives.

BY GRACE TOOHEY

When the Eaton fire broke out in the foothills near Altadena, the Los Angeles County Fire Department did not have access to a satellite-based fire-tracking program regularly used by other agencies, depriving officials of intelligence that could have been helpful in determining evacuations.

The National Guard's FireGuard program, which analyzes images from military satellites to distribute real-time fire progression maps several times an hour, is considered particularly helpful to fire officials when aircraft can't fly. But officials with the L.A. County Fire Department said they weren't aware of the resource during the Eaton fire and therefore didn't utilize FireGuard's data or maps.

This may have left Altadena at a disadvantage. With all aircraft grounded within an hour of the Eaton fire's start, fire officials lost significant situational awareness and were forced to rely almost exclusively on ground observations. That

became increasingly difficult as night fell, smoke intensified and powerful winds pushed flames and embers farther and more rapidly into neighborhoods.

The county has faced months of criticism after The Times revealed in January that officials did not order evacuations for west Altadena until nine hours after the fire started. All but one of the 19 people who died in the Eaton fire were found in west Altadena, among them a 54-year-old woman whose family has claimed she died because of the delayed evacuation alerts.

Not having access to FireGuard during the Eaton fire appears to have made the L.A. County Fire Department an outlier among large fire agencies in California, as the majority of those contacted by The Times confirmed that they have used it for years. The findings raise further questions about how the county fire agency prepared for and responded to the deadly blaze, particularly with how officials failed to issue timely evacuation alerts for west Altadena and appeared completely overwhelmed as embers and flames marched westward.

Some experts say it's possible FireGuard satellite mapping could have better informed incident command. [See FireGuard, A9]

DIABLO CANYON PLANT TO STAY ACTIVE

PG&E deal extends the life of the state's last nuclear power facility until 2030.

BY HAYLEY SMITH AND NOAH HAGGERTY

California environmental regulators on Thursday struck a landmark deal with Pacific Gas & Electric to extend the life of the state's last remaining nuclear power plant in exchange for thousands of acres of new land conservation in San Luis Obispo County.

PG&E's agreement with the California Coastal Commission is a key hurdle for the Diablo Canyon nuclear plant to remain online until at least 2030. The plant was slated to close this year, largely due to concerns over seismic safety, but state officials pushed to delay it — saying the plant remains essential for the reliable operation of California's electrical grid. Diablo Canyon provides nearly 9% of the electricity generated in the state, making it the state's single largest source.

The Coastal Commission voted 9 to 3 to approve the plan, settling the fate of some 12,000 acres that surround the power plant as a means of compensation for environmental harm caused by its continued operation.

Nuclear power does not emit greenhouse gases. But Diablo Canyon uses an estimated 2.5 billion gallons of ocean water each day to absorb heat in a process known as "once-through cooling," which kills an estimated 2 billion or more marine or-

Trump signs order to limit states' regulation of AI

Tech industry leaders champion the move, but lawmakers warn it cuts protections.

BY QUEENIE WONG

The battle between California and the White House escalated as President Trump signed an executive order to block state laws regulating artificial intelligence.

The president's power

move to try to take over control of the regulation of the technology behind ChatGPT through an executive order Thursday was applauded by his allies in Silicon Valley, who have been warning that many layers of heavy-handed rules and regulations were holding them back and could put the U.S. behind in the battle to benefit most from AI.

The order directs the attorney general to create a task force to challenge some state AI laws. States with "onerous AI laws" could lose

federal funding from a broadband deployment program and other grants, the order said.

The Trump administration said the order will help U.S. companies win the AI race against countries such as China by removing "cumbersome regulation."

It also pushes for a "minimally burdensome" national standard rather than a patchwork of laws across 50 states that the administration said makes compliance challenging, especially for [See AI, A12]



ALEJANDRA RAJAL For The Times

PEOPLE sing in front of an altar to the Virgin of Guadalupe at the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City on Wednesday as pilgrims seek her help.

Pilgrims flock to honor the 'mother of Mexico'

Millions make trek to celebrate the Virgin of Guadalupe

BY KATE LINTHICUM

MEXICO CITY — Edivaldo Hernández Villar crawled on his knees toward the Basilica of Guadalupe, wincing and whispering prayers.

It was the final stretch of a punishing

sleeping under the stars at night. As with an estimated 10 million other Mexicans who will make their way to the basilica this month, their journey had been an act of faith, of penitence, and of thanks.

"You endure cold, you endure hunger, you cross mountains," said

'Capt. Hollywood' won't face charges

Detectives say LAPD leaders undermined probe of tip CBS got about rape allegation.

BY RICHARD WINTON, JAMES QUEALLY AND LIBOR JANY

A former Los Angeles Police Department commander who authorities said tipped off CBS to a rape allegation against the network's top executive will not face criminal charges, with two LAPD detectives claiming department leaders undermined the investigation, according to documents obtained by The Times.

The L.A. County district attorney's office decided in April it would not prosecute Cory Palka for warning CBS executives in 2017 that a woman had walked into the LAPD's Hollywood station and accused then-Chief Executive Les Moonves of sexual

assault, according to a document provided to The Times in response to a public records request.

Although heavily redacted, the declination memo includes details and a timeline that match up with the findings of a 2022 New York state attorney general's office investigation that first revealed Palka's relationship with Moonves. The TV executive's career ended in disgrace after dozens of women came forward to accuse him of sexual harassment and abuse in 2018.

Palka has not disputed that he improperly disclosed information to CBS, but denied any improper benefit from his relationship with Moonves when reached for comment by The Times this week.

The former LAPD chief who led the department during the investigation, Michel Moore, called allegation. [See Captain, A6]



men FireGuard might have saved lives in Altadena

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[FireGuard, from A1]
manders, particularly on
evacuation decisions,
though it's far from clear
how it might have changed
the response — if at all.

Mapping from
FireGuard, reviewed
months after the fire,
showed it did track the fire's
steady progression west for
several hours before flames
overran west Altadena —
and well before the evacua-
tion alerts went out.

"Did they not know that it
shifted to [west Altadena]?
That then could have been
information that would have
been helpful," said Michael
Gollner, an associate profes-
sor of mechanical engineer-
ing at UC Berkeley who
leads its Fire Research Lab.
"Or maybe they knew, but
they said we couldn't do any-
thing about it" because of
overtaxed resources.

FireGuard "could have
been useful ... in terms of life
safety and evacuating peo-
ple out of the way," he added.
"It depends on what they
knew, and when they knew
it."

Some county officials
agree.

"It's something that they
should have had, but now
they've put that into play,"
said L.A. County Supervisor
Kathryn Barger, who repre-
sents the unincorporated
town of Altadena.

In the aftermath of the
fire, the L.A. County Fire De-
partment has moved to inte-
grate FireGuard into its op-
erating platforms. Fire Chief
Anthony Marrone said the
program, along with plans
for other technological im-
provements, will "aid in fu-
ture wildfires but will never
replace the primary source
of situational awareness,
such as by air and reporting
back from the field."

Barger wouldn't go so far
as to say the Fire Depart-
ment missed an opportunity
by not having FireGuard in
place, but focused on how
volatile the conditions were
that night.

"Between the wind and
the fire ... it was like all of a
sudden it was on top of them
out of nowhere," Barger said.
"The fire chief has said that,
quite frankly, they were out-
paced on this fire because it
was moving so rapidly."

But some recent analyses
of the fire have confirmed
that there were earlier signs
that the fire was shifting
west, though it's unclear
how well they were realized
by fire officials. At least one
suggestion to expand evacua-
tion orders to the west went
unheeded around midnight
on Jan. 7.

The first evacuation alert
for west Altadena was is-
sued at 3:25 a.m. on Jan. 8,
well after several fires had
been reported in the area.
Some sections of the town
weren't ordered to evacuate
until just before 6 a.m. No
part of west Altadena was is-
sued an evacuation warning.
Residents have recalled har-
rowing escapes from smoke-
filled homes and under rain-
ing embers.

West Altadena, home to a
more racially diverse popu-
lation than the town's east-
ern side, stemming from
historical redlining, would
end up the hardest hit by the
fire.

L.A. County officials have
repeatedly failed to provide
a detailed explanation as to
why the evacuation alerts
for west Altadena came so
late, or who was responsible,
but a Times review of the
process makes clear that
county officials were several
steps behind the fire as it
spread west.

In an independent review
of the county's evacuation
system, completed by Mc-
Chrystal Group in Septem-



ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

SATELLITE data showed the Eaton fire heading toward west Altadena, where 18 died, hours before evacuation alerts were issued.



GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

CLAIRE WAVELL hugs her daughter May after seeing their Altadena home still standing on Jan. 10. Theirs was one of only three houses on the Boulder Road block to survive the Eaton inferno largely unscathed.



ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

A WORKER in protective gear cleans up toxic debris on Feb. 4 at an Altadena home destroyed in the fire.

enue, the unofficial east-
west divider for the town, ac-
cording to the state report.
FireGuard images from
around that time also
showed the fire clearly mov-
ing west in the San Gabriel
foothills north of Altadena,
though it was also simulta-
neously expanding on an
eastern edge close to Sierra
Madre.

said in a statement. "When
unified command learned
that the fire was seen north
of Lake and moving west, it
validated and acted to issue
the orders that were sent
out."

Although Oliva acknowl-
edged that the FireGuard
maps showed the fire mov-
ing northwest the night of
Jan. 7, she said that "to be
clear the FireGuard im-

when it had been made
widely available to local
agencies through different
operating platforms.

"The Department was
neither aware of, nor had ac-
cess to, FireGuard until af-
ter the January 2025 fires,"
Oliva said. She said in Au-
gust that the agency worked
with the federal government
to incorporate the program
as a layer within the depart-
ment's electronic incident
command platform, Tablet
Command. Before that, she
said, the agency didn't have
the ability to incorporate
FireGuard.

Shawn Tyrie, a partner
with McNChrystal Group who
reviewed the FireGuard
maps, said they provide
some helpful information,
but he noted the maps didn't
pick up smaller spot fires
and aren't very detailed. He
didn't find the data "good
enough to say definitively
that you can make decisions
... based on FireGuard data
alone."

Still, his consulting firm
recommended the county
implement FireGuard to
better inform future fire-

Colo., during which aircraft
were grounded for the first
eight hours of the blaze.

The Times reached out to
more than 10 of the largest
firefighting agencies in Cal-
ifornia, the majority of which
confirmed that they had ac-
cess to FireGuard as of Jan-
uary and had implemented
the data into their systems
and processes. A few officials
with the California Depart-
ment of Forestry and Fire
Protection who spoke about
FireGuard were surprised or
confused that L.A. County
hadn't been using the pro-
gram.

Phillip SeLegue, staff
chief of Cal Fire's intelli-
gence program, noted that
while FireGuard still has
some shortcomings — it
doesn't provide a full fire pe-
rimeter and requires inter-
net connectivity to access —
it has still become a game
changer for "early detection
and ongoing assessment."
"It's very valuable to us ...
It's dramatically improved
our fire spread prediction,"
SeLegue said. "What Fire-
Guard gives us is 24/7, per-
sistent coverage."

In addition to Cal Fire

Guard troops, FireGuard
uses Department of Defense
satellites to detect and track
wildfires, distributing un-
classified information
among firefighting net-
works, according to the Na-
tional Guard. Specific intel-
ligence specialists work to
map hot areas of active fire
at approximately 15-minute
intervals, providing imaging
at about a 400-meter resolu-
tion, SeLegue said.

Though Cal Fire and the
Angeles National Forest
both were using the pro-
gram during the Eaton fire
and were in L.A. County,
Oliva said, the county fire
agency was "not aware that
it was an available tool that
could accurately track a
fire's progression and no
other agencies that re-
sponded to the Eaton fire ...
shared any FireGuard data
with us."

Officials with agencies
that have been using Fire-
Guard described it as a help-
ful application in a growing
landscape of fire technology,
mostly used for higher-level
decision-making.

"FireGuard can be one
piece of this," said Andrew
Dowd, a spokesperson for
the Ventura County Fire De-
partment. He called it "one
small tool in the toolbox."

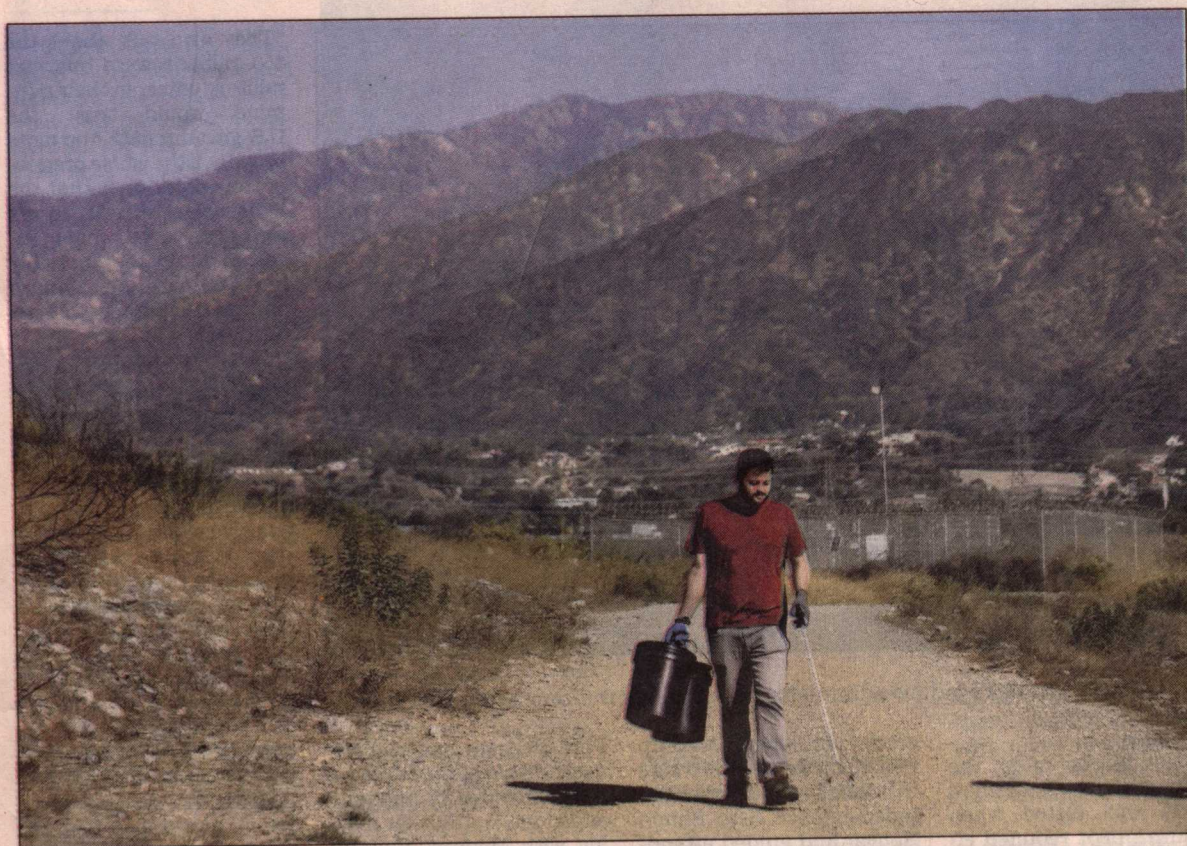
While some helicopters
were grounded during the
2024 Mountain fire, Dowd
said, fixed-wing aircraft
were still able to fly, so Fire-
Guard wasn't relied on for
situational awareness.

"On certain fires, when
I'm not getting anything
else, I have definitely used
it," said Erin Opliger, a spe-
cial projects leader with the
San Bernardino County Fire
Department, who works on
geographic information sys-
tems and data analytics for
the agency. "It does show [a
fire's] general spread."

Suzann Leininger, who
works on intelligence with
Cal Fire-San Diego County,
said the maps from the Fire-
Guard program don't show
exact perimeters but still
provide useful progression
information.

"It's certainly helpful
when you don't have any
kind of flight available and
when it's too windy to fly,"
Leininger said.

But understanding the
program and making sure



Photographs by GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

METEOROLOGIST Edgar McGregor collects trash in the Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area in Irwindale.

Amid catastrophic loss, mighty San Gabriel Mountains beckon

In the post-Eaton fire rebuild, columnist seeks ideas for path ahead

Voices

STEVE LOPEZ COLUMNIST

In December 2020, a reader suggested I get in touch with a young Pasadena man named Edgar McGregor, who was approaching 500 straight days of picking up trash in local parks, including Eaton Canyon. I connected with McGregor by email but then got sidetracked by other things, as did he.

McGregor, now 25, still is picking up trash, and he also picked up a climate science degree at San José State in 2023. He operates a weather forecasting service out of his home, with a focus on the foothill communities of the San Gabriel Mountains, and has a keen interest in Santa Ana winds. This brought him a sizable following of people who paid close attention to his forecasts, [See Lopez, A8]



McGREGOR tries to enjoy nature and not be angry with litterbugs.

Why California workers are taking a hit

Thousands have been laid off this year as AI shakes up the media and tech industries.

BY LAURENCE DARMIENTO

California is among the world's largest economies, but the engines that drive it haven't been firing on all cylinders.

The state has been buffeted by a litany of layoffs this year from Hollywood to Silicon Valley — and beyond. Economists cite several explanations, including contraction in the entertainment industry, displacements caused by artificial intelligence and overall uncertainty in the national economy.

This year, thousands of workers at Amazon, Intel, Salesforce, Meta, Paramount, Warner Bros. and

Walt Disney Co. have lost their jobs. Even Apple just announced a rare round of cuts.

Seemingly no corner of entertainment and tech has been immune from the cost-cutting that has put workers on edge.

"People are hunkering down because they think a storm is coming," UC Berkeley labor economist Jesse Rothstein said.

Through October, there were 158,734 layoffs an-

nounced in California, compared with 136,661 for the same period last year. That was the most of any state, lagging behind only Washington, D.C., which has been hit hard by federal downsizing, according to outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas Inc.

Nationwide, the layoffs have topped 1 million for the year, the most since the pandemic began, according to Challenger. [See Economy, A12]

'1,000%' hike in attacks on ICE not seen in the records

A Times review finds scuffles but mostly no injuries, undercutting claim by president.

BY JAMES QUEALLY AND BRITNY MEJIA

The federal prosecutor faced the jury, brandishing the item he said had been "used as a sword" to assault a federal officer during a July protest in downtown Los Angeles.

The object that Assistant U.S. Atty. Patrick Kibbe said was wielded as a weapon: an umbrella that an investigator needed a special scale to weigh because it was less than 1 pound.

For months, Trump administration officials have cited violence against federal law enforcement officers carrying out the president's deportation campaign as justification for aggressive tactics, including threats to deploy the National Guard and U.S. Mar-

ines. The Department of Homeland Security has touted a staggering figure, claiming a 1,000% increase in assaults against Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents.

But a Times analysis of court records related to assaults on federal law enforcement in Los Angeles, San Diego, Portland, Ore., Chicago and Washington shows the majority of the alleged attacks resulted in no injury to an agent. In roughly 42% of the cases The Times reviewed, federal law enforcement officers were either shoved, spat on or flailed at, or had water bottles thrown at them, according to court affidavits.

During the umbrella assault trial in October, prosecutors provided no evidence of any injuries. In L.A. and across the country, defendants accused of assaulting federal officers have won acquittals or seen charges dropped. More than a third of the cases The Times analyzed ended in dismissals or [See ICE, A6]

3 children among dead in shooting at Stockton party

An adult is also killed and 11 are injured at a banquet hall. The gunman was at large.

BY JESSICA GARRISON, JACK FLEMMING AND CAROLINE PETROW-COHEN

STOCKTON — Stockton was reeling after a gunman entered a banquet hall where more than 100 people had gathered for a family event Saturday night and opened fire, killing three children and one adult and wounding 11 others.

The mass shooting left people running for their lives and prompted an intense

manhunt for the gunman. Authorities asked the public for tips and surveillance footage, offering a \$25,000 reward for information that leads to an arrest, but said there was no threat to the community.

The violence reverberated across Stockton, a Central Valley city of 300,200 that has struggled with violent crime but has worked hard to curb it in recent years.

"This is Thanksgiving weekend. This is when families come together," said Mayor Christina Fugazi. "Stockton is better than this."

At a news conference Sunday afternoon, the mayor broke into tears, saying of the slain children: "They [See Shooting, A10]

Bipartisan demands for legal scrutiny of U.S. boat strikes

BY KEVIN FREKING

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers from both parties said Sunday that they support congressional reviews of U.S. military strikes

strike poses serious legal concerns.

"This rises to the level of a war crime if it's true," said Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.).

Rep. Michael R. Turner (R-Ohio), when asked about a follow-up strike aimed at

the attacks on vessels that the Trump administration says are transporting drugs, but the allegation regarding the Sept. 2 attack "is completely outside anything that has been discussed with Congress, and there is



CALIFORNIA

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ROBERT GAUTHIER Los Angeles Times

MEGAN WEINRAUB sits in her Volkswagen T2 bus, which she calls "Azul, the magic bus," last month in L.A.

'Beacon of hope' after fire, a VW bus is given a retool

The owner didn't realize her vehicle survived the Palisades fire, but an Associated Press photo changed that. Then VW reached out to her.

BY LINDZI SCHARF

Recovery from the Palisades and Altadena fires in January is ongoing, but one small bright spot has emerged from the ruin and darkness.

A blue-and-white 1977 Volkswagen T2 bus — a viral sensation after miraculously surviving the mass destruction of homes, schools and businesses — has been available for public viewing after a major restoration.

The revamped "Azul, the magic bus," as 30-year-old owner Megan Weinraub calls it, was featured at this year's Los Angeles Auto Show, which ended Sunday at the Los Angeles Convention Center in downtown L.A. From there, the VW will be

[See VW, B5]



MARK J. TERRILL Associated Press

THE VOLKSWAGEN bus stands out among burned homes in Malibu on Jan. 9.

Youth orchestra in East L.A. is back



BY CERY S DAVIES

After recently announcing major cuts to its youth orchestra, the L.A. Phil has secured additional donor funding to ensure the East L.A. branch of the Youth Orchestra Los Angeles (YOLA) program will continue at full capacity until the end of the school year.

In an email to the students' parents last month, the nonprofit organization

Santa Monica to pay Black family for 1950s displacement

BY JASMINE MENDEZ

The Santa Monica City Council has agreed to pay a settlement to the family of a Black entrepreneur whose land the city acknowledged was unfairly taken through eminent domain during the 1950s.

More than 60 years later, the payment is part of a larger reparations effort by the city of Santa Monica.

Last month in closed session, the City Council unanimously approved a \$350,000 settlement for the family of Silas White, a Black businessman who leased a building on Ocean Avenue with the intention of buying it to open an exclusively Black hotel and beach club. Instead, the city took the property under the guise of building an auditorium nearby.

The mediation that led to settling a claim filed by White's family was finalized in October. Mayor Pro Tem Caroline Torosis, who worked closely on the case, said the city is working to set up other meaningful reparations for Black residents harmed by its racist past.

"I hate to say this, but the city of Santa Monica took a series of actions to deprive Black Americans of the opportunity of being in Santa Monica. Our history books show that systemic racism, oppression and discrimination happened," Torosis said. "We as a council made a decision, that despite the fact we're facing a very challenging financial time, we want to dedicate funding because [a formal apology to the Black community] is great, but unless it comes with money and meaningful repair, it's just an empty

word."

The decision to settle with the White family comes more than a year after his family first brought to light how the city crushed the man's dream of opening Ebony Beach Club at 1811 Ocean Ave. during the segregated 1950s.

Originally named the Elks Clubhouse, the property was empty 13 years prior to White's plan for a grand opening, according to his daughter, Constance "Connie" White. Registered as a nonprofit corporation, the Ebony Beach Club was scheduled to open Oct. 15, 1958, as advertised on signs posted outside the building.

The city, however, intervened, saying the land was needed as part of a plan to create the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium around the block, according to court records.

The club was subjected to a complaint for condemnation, also known as eminent domain, which allows the city to take private property for public use, according to a report by The Times in 1958. The parcels surrounding the club were empty, the report states.

At the time, White said the city was discriminating against his business because "the organization was primarily Negro."

White, who did not own the land, had just begun making payments on the \$200,000 price tag at the time. The agreement he had with the property owner, Bennett Dorsey, was to pay \$2,700 per month for 15 years, with a second 15-year extension option, according to the city.

White paid one installment of \$2,700 before the

[See Reparations, B2]

ESSENTIAL CALIFORNIA

A historical reality: Even citizens aren't safe from *la migra*

BY GUSTAVO ARELLANO

Jimmy Rhoades was spraying pesticide on orange trees in San Juan Capistrano on Aug. 28 when a yell went up in the air:

Immigration agents were staging a raid.

Mexican nationals working alongside Rhoades ran into the groves and hid for hours. But *la migra* stuck

hour hell began.

This episode took place nearly 75 years ago, but for Latinos in Southern California and beyond, the same kind of drama is sadly becoming just another day of life in President Trump's America.

Rhoades and his co-workers — including a Mexican American — were driven down to Oceanside and stuffed into a room. When he

Gabriel

opez, from A8] ing to happen," Jones d. "We'd never be able to vite a geologist to dinner." As we descended a wind- g path toward the trail, nes spotted something at interested her on the ce of a steep wall of rock. "That looks like fault puge," Jones said, examin- ing some bleached, sandy aterial sandwiched by arker, more solid rock. She didn't seem particu- arly alarmed, even though ve were looking at what might be an example of what Jones called ridgetop shat- tering, which can be associ- ated with seismic activity. And we were in the vicinity of the Sierra Madre fault, which conspired in prehis- toric time with the San An- dreas fault to form the San Gabriel Mountains. Several million years ago, Jones said, there were no San Gabriel Mountains. The land was flat until a trans- verse kink in the San Andre- as fault, which separates two great tectonic saucers — one sliding slowly to the south- east and one to the north- west — collected pressure that began pushing upward and forming the mountains. The San Gabriels still are climbing, and among the fastest-rising mountains in the world.

I often feel, when talking to Jones, that I'm asking questions that might get me kicked out of class. But I tried another one on her: Why is this mountain range so steep?

"Because earthquakes are pushing it up faster than erosion is bringing it down," Jones said, reminding me that the San Andreas is on the north side of the range and the Sierra Madre on the south side. "Every 5,000 years or so, the Sierra Madre fault moves again and pushes us up another 10 feet."

As horrific as the Big One is sure to be, it's easy enough to push that out of our minds because the timeline is un- knowable. The next destruc- tive quake could be in 5,000 years, or 10,000, or it might visit us before you finish the next sentence. Nobody knows. And there is no earthquake season.

But there are fire sea- sons, and in the evolving or- der of things that can go wrong, especially after what happened in January, L.A.'s proximity to wildlands seems ever more unsettling. "Look at that hillside di- rectly in front of us," Jones said, gazing across the can- yon. "That burned in the Station fire. That's 16 years of regrowth, and it's still struggling."

In typical cycles, burned wildlands can take decades to recover. But they are struggling even in places not visited by fire, thanks to drought and other factors that have led to forest col- lapse.

"We're experiencing 'a higher fire risk because of cli- mate change,'" Jones said. "The ecosystem is so stres- sed, because it's experienc- ing a different climate than it evolved to experience."

We reached the creek at the bottom of the trail and began winding toward the back side of the Jet Propul- sion Laboratory on the edge of the Eaton fire's western boundary. Along the way Jones pointed out the dy- namics of change. In the sand along the creek and in boulders the size of dump trucks, she saw the map of historic reconfiguration.

"Look at the size of the rocks, and they're rounded enough that they've been bouncing around in the stream for a while," she said. "When fire happens and we have stuff coming down, the green burns and the soil comes sloughing off in the rain."

At one point Jones reached across the gurgling creek to hand me her trek- king poles for balance, so I



A WATER collection tower in a debris basin near Agua Canyon in Altadena. Debris basins protect neighborhoods in San Gabriel foothills. Photographs by CARLIN STIEHL For The Times



SEISMOLOGIST Lucy Jones studies a formation on Gabrielino Trail near JPL.

entrance to JPL, might already have been damaged from violent shaking.

Jones told me — awfully casually, it seemed — that big earthquakes always cause fires, that wood-frame construction can compound losses, and that the extent of the disaster "depends on what winds are blowing when the earthquake hap- pens."

I told her I needed to know that she sleeps OK. "Yeah," Jones said. "It's geologic time."

Jones, who spoke fondly of "playing in the moun- tains" with her grandchild- ren, left me with a few words of reassurance.

"I'm not moving," Jones said. "And I'm not convinc- ing my son to raise the grandchildren somewhere else."

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The Eaton and Palisades fires would not have been nearly as devastating with- out the Santa Ana winds that powered them, carrying embers great distances. Al- though there is no evidence at the moment that climate change has an impact on Santa Ana winds, which race over and along parts of the San Gabriel foothill corridor in the fall and early winter, there is evidence that cli- mate change means elevat- ed fire risk.

"The frequency at which we're seeing autumns that are extremely dry is increas- ing," Edgar McGregor told me. That means that when we enter Santa Ana season

without having had much rainfall to douse vegetation, we're primed for disaster."

Another critical factor in the Eaton and Palisades fires was that the winters of 2023 and 2024 were unusu- ally wet, producing vegeta- tion that later became fuel in an unusually dry season. Daniel Swain and other cli- mate scientists refer to these swings from drought to delu- ge as hydroclimate whiplash.

"When it rains, increas- ingly, it pours. That's the way this is playing out globally," said Swain, a researcher for the California Institute for Water Resources.

And why is that happen- ing?

Because we're playing with matches, burning fossil fuels, sending up more greenhouse gases and cook- ing the planet.

"I'm not sure that some folks are aware of how dra- matically warmer it has be- come in the last 30 years," Swain said. "Unfortunately, we're on a trajectory for a lot more warming than we've seen so far," and future warming will be exponential rather than linear.

"It's obviously warmer, but why does that matter so much? Because of the at- mospheric sponge effect," Swain said. "As the tempera- ture of the air rises, the size of the figurative atmosphere expands, and its capacity to absorb water does as well."

The sponge is capable of both absorbing and dump- ing increasing amounts of water. A study published by Swain and other scientists

reported that between 1980 and 2018 in California, hu- man-caused climate change contributed to a doubling of the number of "autumn days with extreme fire weather."

Swain said there's some evidence of a shift in Santa Ana wind timing, with fewer winds in the fall and more in the winter. That's poten- tially a good thing, because the later they are, the great- er the chance that rains have arrived.

Jon Keeley, a research ecologist, UCLA adjunct professor and former Alta- dena resident, doesn't buy the idea of a whiplash effect as an explanation for the January wildfires. He told me climate change is a big- ger factor in the fires that hit Northern California's heav- ily wooded areas than in Southern California's chap- arral terrains.

In January, he said, the primary factors were that Santa Ana winds blew at about twice their usual speed, and the fires were triggered.

The Palisades fire was a reignition of an earlier blaze allegedly set by an arsonist, and the Eaton fire might have been ignited by spark- ing power lines.

Keeley said that once the fires got going, houses, rather than dry vegetation, were the fuel.

More people means more power lines, more triggers and more development, and lowering the risk of fire re- quires a greater focus on all of those things.

"You cannot look at just climate change without ...

talking about population growth, and nobody is talk- ing about population growth," Keeley said.

Swain is in full agreement that climate change is only part of the story, and that there are lessons to be learned from January's twin catastrophes.

"We could see much bet- ter fire outcomes in a higher fire-risk world if we do the right things," he said, in terms of preparation and prevention, and how and where we build.

Swain mentioned Jones' decades of work to educate the public on earthquake risk and preparedness, along with her campaign to elevate building codes and retrofit vulnerable struc- tures.

"I'm almost in awe of the seismology folks who man- aged to convince people to prepare for something we've never seen before," Swain said. "I want to get there with wildfire hazards."

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Many years ago I was out with a friend, kayaking over swells just beyond the jetty at the entrance to Marina del Rey. It was a warm, clear winter day, and as we headed back to shore, the snow-cov- ered peaks of the San Gabri- el Mountains spread out be- fore us in the distance. In less than two hours you could go from swimming to skiing, or from having a dolphin slide under your kayak to having a bear dig through your trash can.

It's easy enough to take this natural environment for granted, as many of us do. One of the things I admire about McGregor is that he doesn't.

I told McGregor I'd spo- ken to two PhDs about the fires and that one empha- sized the need to better understand the urgency of climate change, while the other was focused on reduc- ing fire risk.

"We need to do both," Mc- Gregor said. "I understand the importance of brush clearance, controlled burns and safer homes if you're go- ing to build" in the wildland- urban interface.

But over the last 119 years, by his computations, aver- age daily temperatures in Pasadena increased by an alarming 7 degrees.

McGregor — who lives at Pasadena's northeast

boundary, a block from Alta- dena — began working for L.A. County as a meteorolo- gist after the fire but empha- sized that he was speaking as a private citizen. One who was alarmed last January when, in his home office, he saw that the coming Santa Ana winds would be of high velocity and long duration.

Usually you get a high-ve- locity wind of short duration, he told me, or a low-velocity event of long duration. Santa Anas come in two fla- vors, he added, hot and cold, depending on their origin and characteristics.

"When we get the cold fla- vor, that's when the winds dive over the mountains. They crash into the foothills below and they spread out. That's what was carrying the Eaton fire into Altadena," McGregor said.

I asked if his family con- sidered moving, even though the house was not damaged. He paused before saying his grandparents built the house.

"It's always been in the McGregor family, and it's not really an asset to me, it's a home. And you don't con- sider those things with your home," he said.

"So your home is safe," I said, "but your house might not be."

He said he hadn't thought of it that way.

At the Santa Fe Dam, Mc- Gregor filled buckets with trash, saving his harshest comments for decomposing plastic bags. He distin- guished native plants from nonnative and said we need to better understand that in advancing wildfires, some trees — oaks, for instance — can be beneficial rather than hazardous.

"It's not just that they have moisture in them and can eat embers for break- fast," he said. "But also that they slow down the Santa Ana windstorms."

McGregor said he changed his bio from climate activist to community activ- ist because "that's all-en- compassing. I forecast weather when that's what my community needs. I pick up trash when that's what my community needs."

He could let himself get overwhelmed by the declin- ing health of the planet, or the dunderheaded indiffer- ence at the highest levels. But he chooses not to.

"I protect myself with the knowledge that I'm just an individual, and one that doesn't have that much power, and I don't let it get to

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A WATER collection tower in a debris basin near Agua Canyon in Altadena. Debris basins protect nei

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ROSE, from left, Emily and Emma take a selfie in the "Sliving" lounge of Altadena Girls' facility in Pasadena.

JUDGE ORDERS TROOPS' REMOVAL IN L.A.

Trump doesn't hold 'unchecked power' to control National Guard, ruling says.

By SONJA SHARP AND JOSEPH SERNA

A federal judge ruled Wednesday that the Trump administration must immediately end the deployment of the National Guard in Los Angeles, the latest legal blow to the president's embattled efforts to police American streets with armed troops.

Senior U.S. District Judge Charles R. Breyer said in his ruling that command of the remaining 300 federalized National Guard troops must return to Gov. Gavin Newsom, who sued the administration in June after it commandeered thousands of troops to quell protests over immigration enforcement in Los Angeles.

On June 12, Breyer ruled that deployment illegal — a decision that was ultimately reversed by the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. The court said the esoteric statute Trump invoked to wrest command of the Guard from the governor afforded him "a great level of deference" to determine whether a rebellion was underway in Los Angeles, as the Justice Department claimed at the time.

[See Guard, A7]

Will Altadena Girls remain a success story?

Teen-founded charity tries to keep mission alive

By AUGUST BROWN

The s'more bar was finally bubbling at Altadena Girls' new community space.

A few dozen teen and tween girls, all affected by the wildfires that had ripped their town apart in January, came together for a "cozy cabin" hangout night in downtown Pasadena — some making Christmas ornaments while others applied glittery makeup and temporary tattoos or kicked back on overstuffed furniture.

Avery Colvert, who founded Altadena Girls in January as a 14-year-old, hung garlands and decorations around the 12,000-square-foot complex, beaming that what she'd built was at last open to the world.

The nonprofit was still gussying up the podcast studios, rock band rehearsal rooms and the basement "Sliving" lounge — a young content creators' paradise decorated by Paris Hilton, who coined

the term referring to living your best life.

"We have a video of Avery touring the space at the very beginning, and she was talking about what she imagined would be in each room," her mother, Lauren Sandidge, said at the event last month. "To be sitting here, and now most of the things that we were just riffing on are reality, it's a pretty amazing feeling."

Of all the charities that emerged in the chaos and triage of January's fires, none captured popular attention like Altadena Girls. Avery organized her community to raise donations of clothing, hygiene kits and other essentials (and life-affirming pleasures) that displaced teen girls needed — over a million items in all. Altadena Girls became a social media sensation and a celebrity-beloved cause.

As the community nears the anniversary of the fires, Altadena Girls' flagship project has finally [See Altadena, A14]

FBI is directed to list 'domestic terrorists' in U.S.

Justice Department memo calls for cash rewards for people who report on others.

By MICHAEL WILNER AND ANA CEBALLOS

WASHINGTON — Justice Department leadership has directed the FBI to "compile a list of groups or entities engaged in acts that may constitute domestic terrorism" by the start of next year, and to establish a "cash reward system" that incentivizes individuals to report on their fellow Americans, according to a memo reviewed by The Times.

Law enforcement agencies are directed in the memo, dated Dec. 4, to identify "domestic terrorists" who use violence, or the threat of violence, to advance political and social agendas, including "adherence to radical gender ideology, anti-Americanism, anti-capitalism, or anti-Christianity."

Although the memo does not mention protests against President Trump's immigration crackdown directly, it says that problematic "political and social agendas" could include "opposition to law and immigration enforcement, extreme views in favor of mass migration and open borders."

The memo, sent by Atty. Gen. Pam Bondi to federal prosecutors and law enforcement agencies, follows on a presidential memorandum signed by Trump in the immediate aftermath of the killing of Charlie Kirk, a prominent conservative figure, that gave civil rights groups pause over the potential targeting of political activists, donors and non-

profits opposed to the president.

The memo also outlines what it says are causes of domestic terrorist activity, including "hostility towards traditional views on family, religion, and morality."

"Federal law enforcement will prioritize this threat. Where federal crime is encountered, federal agents will act," the memo states.

Some national security experts said the memo represents a dramatic operational shift, by directing federal prosecutors and agents to approach domestic terrorism in a way that is "ideologically one-sided." At worst, critics said, the memo provides legal justification for criminalizing free speech.

"I think this causes a chilling impact, because it definitely seems to be directing enforcement toward particular points of view," Mary McCord, a former acting U.S. assistant attorney general for national security, said in an interview.

The memo, for example, primarily focuses on antifa-aligned extremism, but omits other trends that in recent years have been identified as rising domestic threats, such as violent white supremacy. Since Trump resumed office, the FBI has cut its office designated to focus on domestic extremism, withdrawing resources from investigations into white supremacists and right-wing antigovernment groups.

The memo's push to collect intelligence on antifa through internal lists and public tip lines also raised questions over the scope of the investigative mission, and how wide a net investigators might cast.

"Whether you're going to [See Justice, A6]

Trump softens his stance on China

Security strategy and chip sales recast U.S. global interests in business terms.

By MICHAEL WILNER

WASHINGTON — President Trump last week released a national security strategy laying out his vision for America's role in the world, tempering U.S. support for long-standing allies and recasting U.S. global interests in business terms.

China took note. The paper's section on Asia, almost entirely devoted to China and the threat of war over Taiwan, concludes with an imperative to win "economic and

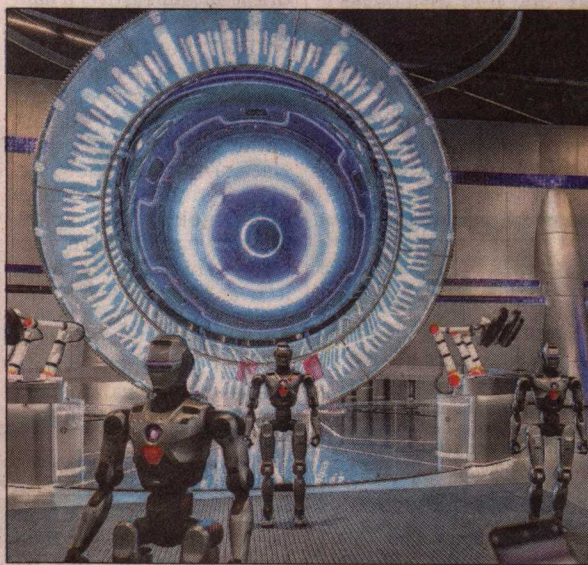
technological competition" in the Indo-Pacific.

But the document offers no strategic plan on how to bolster U.S. alliances and an infrastructural base unprepared for a war this decade. And it never once mentions the race against China for superiority in artificial intelligence.

Three days after releasing the document, Trump announced that Nvidia, the world's most valuable company and leading chipmaker, could begin selling powerful chips to China — the kind of chips key to powering AI. Trump's move broke with decades of U.S. export control policy he once supported.

It was a welcome series of events in Beijing, where Chi-

[See China, A6]



QILAI SHEN Bloomberg

THE U.S. document fails to mention the AI race with China. Above, robots at a museum in Shenzhen.

Fed cuts rate but signals restraint

Central bank says it may hold steady in the coming months, possibly irking Trump.

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER

The Federal Reserve reduced its key interest rate for the third time in a row Wednesday but signaled that it may leave rates unchanged in the coming months, a move that could attract ire from President Trump, who has demanded steep reductions to borrowing costs.

In a statement released after a two-day meeting, the Fed's rate-setting committee signaled that it may keep

For autism causes, experts look to genes, not vaccines



covered the Sierra Nevada, a lake 100 miles long and 600 feet deep sat in eastern California in what is now the Mojave Desert.

As the climate warmed and the ice retreated, the lake dried up, leaving a white salt pan in its place.

But a November of record rainfall has brought the ancient lake, known as Lake Manly, back to life. Now Death Valley, one of the hottest places on Earth and the lowest point in North America, has a desert lake framed by snow-capped mountains.

As far as lakes go, this one is pretty small and is likely to disappear soon.

But it's a marvel to people who live in or visit Death Valley, and a reminder of the extreme weather that has been hitting the area more than 200 feet below sea level.

Climate change has been a growing concern. A few years ago, when temperatures approached the 130-degree mark, "heat tourists" flocked to the desert. Officials have expressed concern about how hotter conditions can affect the plants, birds and wildlife.

Then, there is the rain.

From September to November, the park received 2.41 inches of rain, with 1.76 inches of that total coming in November alone, the Park Service said. The previous wettest November on record was 1.70 inches, in 1923.

The lake last made an appearance in 2023 after Hurricane Hilary, which degraded to a post-tropical low before reaching Southern California, dumped 2.2 inches of rain on the park and filled the basin.

Water levels receded until February 2024, when an atmospheric river dumped an additional 1.5 inches of rain onto the lake, making it deep enough that people could kayak on it. NASA researchers found that the temporary lake was about 3 feet to less than 1.5 feet deep over the course of about six weeks in February and March 2024.

The lake there today doesn't really compare, locals say.

"It's an attraction, but it's not really a lake," said an employee at the Death Valley Inn, who asked to be identified only as Katt, when reached by phone Thursday. "It's the size of a lake, but it's [See Lake, A8]

curing the border amid the government's immigration

der in California.

But the Trump adminis-

San Diego County Board

[See Border, A5]



JASON ARMOND Los Angeles Times

PASTOR Connie Larson DeVaughn leads a prayer circle with members of Altadena Baptist Church, which was destroyed in the Eaton fire in January.

COLUMN ONE

Rebuilding their church, along with their lives

Eaton fire tested faith of small Altadena congregation

By Melissa Gomez

The church members gathered around the room, holding hands. They bowed their heads and closed their eyes, waiting for words of comfort.

"We pray for the people who have lost their homes," said Pastor Connie Larson DeVaughn, standing near the center. "The marathon of it, it's harrowing. Harrowing, and stressful."

After a few seconds of silence, the congregation began calling aloud their own prayers.

"Help us to help each other," one woman said.

"Lift burdens here in our congregation, and in our community," one man called out.

For the last 11 months, members of the Altadena Baptist Church have felt the weight of many burdens. On Jan. 8 — the day after the Eaton fire started and rained down embers — flames engulfed their church. The Altadena Children's Center, started by the church, also was incinerated. Twenty congregants lost their homes. Another 20 were displaced.

Since that horrific day, the congregation has bounced around, forced to find different spaces to worship. A few church members have opened their homes to others. Some are rebuilding, while others are staring down the monumental task of doing so. Still others have thrown

[See Church, A6]

His 31% approval is his lowest yet. Poll finds he's slipped on crime and immigration too.

BY LINLEY SANDERS AND WILL WEISSERT

WASHINGTON — President Trump's approval numbers on the economy and immigration have fallen substantially since March, according to a new AP-NORC poll, the latest indication that two signature issues that got him elected barely a year ago could be turning into liabilities as his party begins to gear up for the 2026 midterms.

Only 31% of U.S. adults now approve of how Trump is handling the economy, the poll from the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds. That is down from 40% in March and marks the lowest economic approval he has registered in an AP-NORC poll in his first or second term. The Republican president also has struggled

to recover from public blowback on other issues, such as his management of the federal government, and has not seen an approval bump even after congressional Democrats in effect capitulated to end a record-long government shutdown last month.

Perhaps most worryingly for Trump, who has become increasingly synonymous with his party, is that he's slipped on issues that were major strengths. Just a few months ago, 53% of Americans approved of Trump's handling of crime, but that has fallen to 43% in the new poll. There has been a similar decline on immigration, from 49% approval in March to 38% now.

The new poll starkly illustrates how Trump has struggled to hold on to political wins since his return to office. Even border security — an issue on which his approval remains relatively high — has declined slightly in recent months.

The good news for Trump is that his overall approval hasn't fallen as [See Poll, A5]

Critics dispute cost of a Hahn Hall retrofit

BY ROGER VINCENT

Los Angeles County plunked down \$200 million last year to buy the Gas Company Tower, calculating that moving to the posh downtown address was a steal compared with the \$700 million it might cost to make its old headquarters earthquake-safe.

But the decision to leave the historic Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration was based on a half-billion-dollar miscalculation, says a group of experts and politicians

trying to save it.

The \$700-million estimate was a massive exaggeration, as it relied on one of the most expensive methods of quake retrofitting, says developer and preservationist Dan Rosenfeld, who is leading the group.

When it presented the estimate for a retrofit, Public Works "didn't just put their thumb on the scale" to show retrofitting was too costly, he said, "they jumped on it with both feet."

The 10-story structure stretches a full city block and [See Hahn Hall, A8]

Senate rejects bid on ACA subsidies

Millions of Americans will see steep increases in their healthcare costs next year. **NATION, A3**

Cougars may get protected status

Wildlife officials say it's long overdue to label the big cats as a threatened species. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

USC to use SoFi after '28 Games

Trojan football probably won't have Coliseum, and Inglewood would be logical site. **SPORTS, B10**

Weather

Mostly sunny; warm. L.A. Basin: 80/50. **B6**

Markets **A12**
Opinion Voices **A13**

For the latest news, go to latimes.com.



State's last nuclear plant will power on till 2030

[Diablo, from A1] the land would be returned to them. Diablo Canyon sits along one of the most rugged and ecologically rich stretches of the California coast.

Under the agreement, PG&E will immediately transfer a 4,500-acre parcel on the north side of the property known as the "North Ranch" into a conservation easement and pursue transfer of its ownership to a public agency such as the California Department of Parks and Recreation, a nonprofit land conservation organization or tribe. A purchase by State Parks would result in a more than 50% expansion of the existing Montaña de Oro State Park.

PG&E will also offer a 2,200-acre parcel on the southern part of the property known as "Wild Cherry Canyon" for purchase by a government agency, nonprofit land conservation organization or tribe. In addition, the utility will provide \$10 million to plan and manage roughly 25 miles of new public access trails across the entire property.

"It's going to be something that changes lives on the Central Coast in perpetuity," Commissioner Christopher Lopez said at the meeting. "This matters to generations that have yet to exist on this planet ... this is going to be a place that so many people mark in their minds as a place that transforms their lives as they visit and recreate and love it in a way most of us can't even imagine today."

Critically, the plan could see Diablo Canyon remain operational much longer than the five years dictated by Thursday's agreement. While the state Legislature only authorized the plant to operate through 2030, PG&E's federal license renewal would cover 20 years of operations, potentially keeping it online until 2045.

Should that happen, the utility would need to make additional land concessions, including expanding an existing conservation area on the southern part of the property known as the "South Ranch" to 2,500 acres. The plan also includes rights of first refusal for a government agency or land conservation group to purchase the entirety of the South Ranch, 5,000 acres, along with Wild Cherry Canyon — after 2030.

Many stakeholders were frustrated by the carve-out for the South Ranch, but still saw the agreement as an overall victory for Californians.

"It is a once in a lifetime opportunity," Sen. John Laird (D-Santa Cruz) said in a phone call ahead of Thursday's vote. "I have not been out there where it has not been breathtakingly beautiful, where it is not this incredible, unique location, where you're not seeing, for much of it, a human struc-



GEORGE ROSE Getty Images

THE DIABLO CANYON nuclear power plant provides nearly 9% of the electricity generated in California.

Land deal to keep Diablo Canyon Power Plant open

The deal decides the fate of the rugged coastal landscape that surrounds the nuclear facility.



Acreage totals are proposed. Pacific Gas & Electric

HAILEY WANG Los Angeles Times

understanding how taking the land ... is mitigation for marine life," Tucker said. "It doesn't change anything as far as impacts to the water. It changes a lot as far as impacts to the land."

The deal has been complicated by jurisdictional questions, including who can determine what happens to the land. While PG&E owns the North Ranch parcel that could be

transferred to State Parks, the South Ranch and Wild Cherry Canyon are owned by its subsidiary, Eureka Energy Company.

What's more, the California Public Utilities Commission, which regulates utilities such as PG&E, has a Tribal Land Transfer Policy that calls for investor-owned power companies to transfer land they no longer want to Native American tribes.

In the case of Diablo Canyon, the Coastal Commission became the decision maker because it has the job of compensating for environmental harm from the facility's continued operation. Since the commission determined Diablo's use of ocean water can't be avoided, it looked at land conservation as the next best method.

This "out-of-kind" trade-off is a rare, but not unheard of way of making up for the loss of marine life. It's an approach that is "feasible and more likely to succeed" than several other methods considered, according to the commission's staff report. "This plan supports the continued operation of a major source of reliable electricity for California, and is in alignment with our state's clean energy goals and focus on coastal protection," Paula Gerfen, Diablo Canyon's senior vice president and chief nuclear officer, said in a statement.

But Assemblymember Dawn Addis (D-Morro Bay) said the deal was "not the best we can do" — particularly because the fate of the South Ranch now depends on the plant staying in operation beyond 2030.

"I believe the time really is now for the immediate full conservation of the 12,000 [acres], and to bring accountability and trust back for the voters of San Luis Obispo County," Addis said during the meeting.

There are also concerns about the safety of continuing to operate a nuclear plant in California, with its radioactive waste stored in

concrete casks on the site. Diablo Canyon is subject to ground shaking and earthquake hazards, including from the nearby Hosgri Fault and the Shoreline Fault, about 2.5 miles and 1 mile from the facility, respectively.

PG&E says the plant has been built to withstand hazards. It completed a seismic hazard assessment in 2024, and determined Diablo Canyon is safe to continue operation through 2030. The Coastal Commission, however, found if the plant operates longer, it would warrant further seismic study.

A key development for continuing Diablo Canyon's operation came in 2022 with Senate Bill 846, which delayed closure by up to five additional years. At the time, California was plagued by rolling blackouts driven by extreme heat waves, and state officials were growing wary about taking such a major source of power offline.

But California has made great gains in the last several years — including massive investments in solar energy and battery storage — and some questioned whether the facility is still needed at all.

Others said conserving thousands of acres of land still won't make up for the harms to the ocean.

"It is unmitigatable," said David Weisman, executive director of the nonprofit Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility. He noted that the Coastal Commission's staff report says it would take about 99 years to balance the loss of marine life with the benefits provided by 4,500 acres of land conservation. Twenty more years of operation would take about 305 years to strike that same balance.

But some pointed out that neither the commission nor fisheries data find Diablo's operations cause declines in marine life. Ocean harm may be overestimated, said Seaver Wang, an oceanographer and the climate and energy director at the Breakthrough Institute, a Berkeley-based research center.

In California's push to transition to clean energy, every option comes with downsides, Wang said. In the case of nuclear power — which produces no greenhouse gas emissions — it's all part of the trade-off, he said.

"There's no such thing as impacts-free energy," he said.

The Coastal Commission's vote is one of the last remaining obstacles to keeping the plant online. PG&E will also need a final nod from the Regional Water Quality Control Board, which decides on a pollution discharge permit in February.

The federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission will also have to sign off on Diablo's extension.

After catastrophic fire, the Palisadian-Post bids farewell

[Palisades, from A1] print a newspaper nobody reads."

The fire destroyed more than 2,600 businesses in Pacific Palisades, according to researchers at the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute and the Center for Neighborhood Knowledge. It partially damaged more than 650 more.

Most, researchers said, were small businesses.

The newspaper started

outlets, it struggled.

Beset by plummeting circulation and web traffic, advertising losses, ownership consolidation and changing reader habits in the era of smartphones and social media, thousands of U.S. newspapers have closed over the last two decades.

Smolinisky, a real estate entrepreneur who was born and raised in the Palisades, is a part owner of the L.A. Dodgers. He was 33 when he bought the Palisadian-Post



Thursday that, more than anything, he was grateful for his 25 years covering everything from Little League baseball to high school volleyball and water polo to the annual Pacific Palisades Turkey Trot 5K and 10K races.

"I've had a blast," he said. "No regrets. It was a joy every day."

As the only person covering sports for the small paper, Galluzzo did it all — reporting, editing and shooting his own photographs.



KAYLA BARTKOWSKI Los Angeles Times

DESPITE a new state law, the Kendall family of Pacific Palisades was denied 12 months of mortgage relief.

15 killed in attack at Jewish event in Sydney

Shooters at Hanukkah celebration on Bondi Beach are father and son, authorities say.

BY KRISTEN GELINEAU, CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-McLAY AND ROD MCGUIRK

SYDNEY — Two gunmen opened fire during a Hanukkah celebration on Sydney's Bondi Beach, killing 15 people, including a child, officials said Monday, in what Prime Minister Anthony Albanese called an act of antisemitic terrorism that struck at the heart of the nation. The shooters were father and son, authorities said.

The massacre at one of Australia's most popular beaches — in an area with a large Jewish community — followed a wave of antisemitic attacks that have roiled the country over the last year, although the authorities didn't suggest those episodes and Sunday's shooting were connected. It is the deadliest shooting in almost three decades in a country with strict gun control laws.

One gunman, 50, was fatally shot by police. The other shooter, his 24-year-old son, was wounded and being treated at a hospital, said Mal Lanyon, the New South Wales police commissioner.

Police said one gunman was known to security services, but Lanyon said authorities had no indication of a planned attack.

Those killed were between 10 and 87 years old, New South Wales Premier Chris Minns told reporters. At least 38 others were injured in the attack.

[See Bondi Beach, A4]

U.S. indictment alleges child sex abuse ring

BY CLARA HARTER AND BRITTNY MEJIA

This article contains descriptions of sexual violence.

The 15-year-old girl was sitting in her bedroom when "Sociopath" and "Rohan" added her to a Discord chat that, several months later, would nearly end in her death.

She said within hours of joining the chat on the online messaging platform in 2020, she became the target

of a network of predators who, according to federal prosecutors in an indictment, specialize in coercing minors to perform sex acts and self-harm on camera.

She said she initially met Sociopath, identified in the indictment as Kaleb Merritt, during the pandemic on Discord servers dedicated to online games. She said he offered her an upgraded version of Discord in exchange for a conversation. Then, he added her to the chat with Rohan — later identified in the indictment as Rohan Rane.

The teen, whose name is being withheld because of safety concerns, had no idea she was being pulled into a highly organized and terrifying scheme that has ensnared minors across America, including girls in Los Angeles and San Bernardino, according to interviews with victims and federal agents, and a federal indictment in the Central District Court of California.

Members of the sex-ploitation ring seek vulnerable girls, having found many in online communities dedi-

[See Sex abuse, A6]



FEDERICO PARRA AFP/Getty Images

SOCIAL MEDIA have fueled talk of a U.S. invasion and the fate of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. Above, his supporters rally Saturday.

Venezuela's holidays shadowed by rumors

BY MERY MOGOLLÓN AND PATRICK J. McDONNELL

CARACAS, Venezuela — Even in Venezuela, a nation battered by years of economic, social and political turmoil, the Christmas season is a time to put aside one's troubles, spend time with family, enjoy a bit of holiday cheer — if you can escape the ubiquitous uncer-

social media fuel the daily rumor mill, in part because access to independent news is severely restricted.

"One hears so much on social media but learns little," said Begoña Monasterio, 78, who was out shopping in Caracas, the capital, for ingredients to prepare las hallacas, the country's emblematic Christmas dish. It's a succulent mix of cornmeal, meat, olives, raisins and other delectables cooked and wrapped in banana leaves, a kind of

Mortgage law doesn't help all fire victims

Servicers sometimes deny relief, despite state officials' promises

BY LAURENCE DARMIENTO

After business consultant Len Kendall lost his Pacific Palisades home in the January firestorms, he sought to put a temporary stop on his mortgage payments but set aside the effort after realizing the paperwork involved.

So he was pleased to learn in September about a new state law that required mortgage servicers to offer up to 12 months of relief to fire victims, with only an affirmation of financial hardship and a ban on lump sum repayments.

However, Kendall was shocked when his servicer told him he didn't qualify, which prompted him to fight back. He was finally offered three months of relief in October, the minimum initial amount required under the law.

But what also surprised him was being told he would have to repay what he owed in a lump sum — though he could be "evaluated" for other repayment options, according to messages reviewed by The Times.

"If they were to offer a forbearance to people, it really wouldn't cost them much. It would just be a delay in getting the same amount of money, and even that they're unwilling to do in this ex-

treme situation," said Kendall, 42, who lived in the home with his wife and toddler. "It's just ghoulish."

Kendall is among dozens of homeowners who were victims of the Palisades and Eaton fires who allege that their banks and mortgage services aren't giving them the relief they expected from a state law that was intended to help them.

Among the complaints are denials that fail to cite legal justification, demands for lump sum repayments and servicers reporting borrowers to credit bureaus.

The law through which Kendall sought assistance, Assembly Bill 238, was signed by Gov. Gavin Newsom in September. It strengthened a voluntary program he had created in January that 420 institutions signed on to and which initially provided just three months of relief.

It's unclear how many homeowners have applied for mortgage forbearance under the law, which applies to victims of the Eaton and Palisades fires and the concurrent windstorms.

But Assemblymember John Harabedian (D-Pasadena), who co-sponsored the legislation, said his office has received about two dozen complaints accusing lenders and servicers of not complying with the law. [See Mortgage, A12]

Shift on hep B shot guide seen as risky

BY SONJA SHARP

For most American infants, the hepatitis B shot comes just before their first bath, in the blur of pokes, prods and pictures that attend a 21st century hospital delivery.

But as of last week, thousands of newborns across the U.S. will no longer receive the initial inoculation for hepatitis B — the first in a litany of childhood vaccinations and the top defense against one of the world's deadliest cancers.

On Dec. 5, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's powerful vaccine advisory panel voted to nix the decades-old birth-dose recommendation.

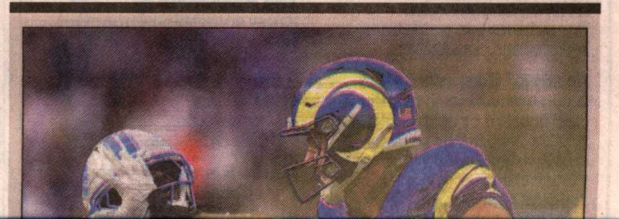
The change was pushed by Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F.

Kennedy Jr. and his "Make America Healthy Again" movement, which has long sought to rewrite the CDC's childhood vaccine schedule and unwind state immunization requirements for kindergarten.

California officials have vowed to keep the state's current guidelines in place, but the federal changes could threaten vaccine coverage by some insurers and public benefits programs, along with broader reverberations.

"It's a gateway," said Jessica Malaty Rivera, an infectious-disease epidemiologist in Los Angeles. "It's not just hepatitis B — it's chipping away at the entire schedule."

Democratic-led states and blue-chip insurance companies have scrambled [See Vaccine, A8]



[Sex abuse, from A1] cated to mental health or survivors of prior abuse, according to the federal agents.

In the early morning hours of July 4, 2020, Rohan and Kaleb, as she came to know them, sent the 15-year-old girl her home and school addresses, photos of her family, a screenshot of where her little sister's sports team practiced and a trove of other personal information in the Discord group chat, she told The Times in an interview.

Next, she said, they sent her videos of minors performing sexual acts, followed by videos of homes being raided by SWAT teams, which they said happened to those who disobey them, echoing extortion tactics alleged in the indictment.

Then, they gave the teenager orders: Turn on your camera and do exactly what we say.

She felt like there was a digital gun pressed against her head.

"In that moment, they're like, 'Even if you did tell your parents, they're not going to be able to find out who we are and we won't leave you alone,'" said the victim, who is now 21.

Fearing the men would harm her family, she said, she took off her clothes, wrote "slut" and "whore" on her skin, drew a pentagram on her chest, put a letter opener into her vagina, got on her knees and prayed for their mercy, reflecting demands described in the indictment.

The men recorded the night's abuse and used it to blackmail the girl into performing escalating acts of self-harm for around nine months, she said.

She said she eventually cut Rohan's name so deeply into her arms that she needed to use glue to seal the wounds.

Around March 2021, she said, Rohan gave her a horrific choice: kill herself or watch as he posted all the content he had of her online.

"At that point, I would have rather not be seen in that light, than be in the light of day at all, because of how humiliating the things that they got me to say and do were," she said.

Following Rohan's orders, she washed down painkillers with alcohol.

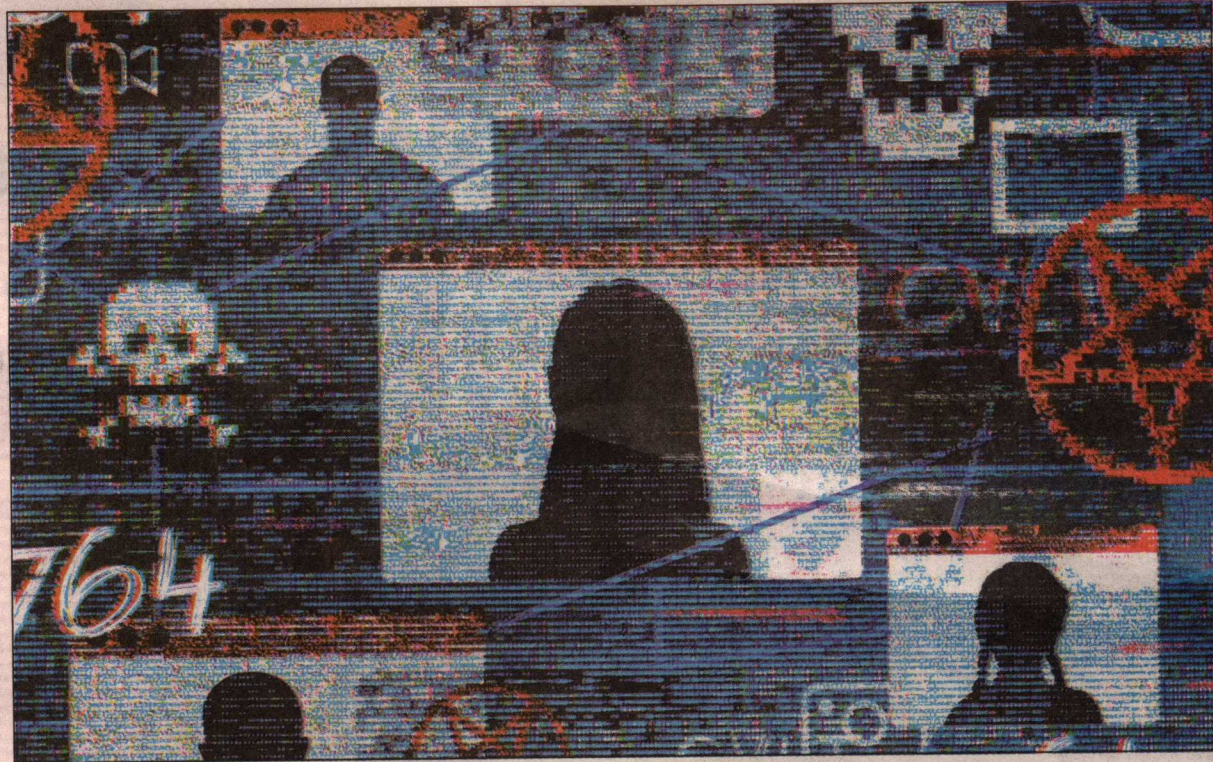
She survived, but not every minor targeted by this network of abusers has been as lucky.

This year, Rane and Merritt were identified in the indictment as alleged leaders of a group called CVLT, which federal authorities say has since splintered and grown into an even more sprawling sexploitation network called 764.

These violent online groups have allegedly abused hundreds of mostly female minor victims worldwide, according to Homeland Security Investigations. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's CyberTipline received more than 1,300 reports related to these online groups in 2024 alone.

Rane, 29, was arrested in France in 2022. He is awaiting trial there for allegedly blackmailing French minors to perform acts of sexual torture on themselves. Merritt, 25, is currently serving a 33-year sentence for the 2021 rape and kidnapping of a 12-year-old girl from Virginia he met online.

Both men were indicted on child exploitation charges in the Los Angeles-based federal court case on Jan. 17, with other alleged key members of CVLT — Clint Borge, 41, of Hawaii and Collin Walker, 24, of New Jersey. Walker has since pleaded guilty and Borge is sched-



JIM COOKE Los Angeles Times

Abuse network ensnared girls

role in prosecution and jail sentences for bad actors."

The case is a step toward justice for the girl who was victimized at 15. But it took years to collect the evidence needed to bring charges against alleged CVLT leaders.

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Toward the end of 2020, Los Angeles-based Homeland Security Investigations special agents Theo Cushing and Jaclyn Jacobson were alerted to a troubling trend.

Law enforcement agencies in multiple states were reporting internet crime cases where minors had names carved into their skin.

"That raised all sorts of red flags for the state and local law enforcement, but also for us, since our investigation showed this was happening across state lines, sometimes outside of the country," Cushing said.

Through their investigation, the federal agents learned that members of CVLT and 764 were building status by getting minors to carve their names into their skin and sharing their collections of "cut signs" in group chats and servers.

As they pored over the gruesome images of disfigured teenage girls, Cushing and Jacobson realized they were not dealing with a standard child sexual abuse case.

"The level of collaboration, the level of technical sophistication and just the physical harm they were causing minors, coupled with child sexual abuse material... That's why we started dedicating significant effort into disassembling [CVLT]," Cushing said.

The ideology of CVLT and the splinter group 764 blends pedophilia with elements of neo-Nazism, nihilism, sadism and chauvinism, he said in an interview.

CVLT victims were coerced into performing dehumanizing acts like cutting and eating their own hair or referring to themselves as slaves, according to the indictment.

"Some of [the perpetrators] are genuine pedophiles with a sexual interest in children," Cushing said. "Some of them do have a deeper philosophy that is interested in controlling people."

Members use extreme content to desensitize children to the point that they are easily manipulated into performing acts of self-harm, according to Cushing. This included displaying videos of animals being tor-

her vagina with a kitchen knife, like a giant one, and it cut her and she was bleeding," she told The Times, describing a video she was sent by members. "They had me do that too."

The girl said she was recruited from a mental health server after she had been previously groomed by a pedophile when she was 11.

"For young people ... if they are struggling with something, often they turn to the internet," Cushing said. "It does make it easy for these types of individuals to find people that are already sometimes in a really tough place psychologically."

Discord can be particularly easy for predators to exploit because its default settings have historically allowed strangers to direct-message kids in the same servers. Abusers can then use private servers, video chats and screen sharing to escalate grooming and coercion without revealing their identities.

Many parents are unaware of how Discord works, leaving minors in environments where predators can pose as peers blending into normal gaming and chat culture. Even if an account is flagged and deleted, the perpetrator can sign up for a new one and rejoin the same servers.

While much of the collaboration among alleged CVLT members and the production of child sexual abuse material took place on Discord, the sharing of photos of names cut into skin and the extortion operations often took place on many other platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram and Telegram, according to Homeland Security Investigations.

Amir Ehsaei, special agent in charge of the FBI's counterterrorism division in Los Angeles, warned that predators in groups like 764 and CVLT operate in all corners of the internet — the dark web, the open web, gaming platforms and social media applications.

"Anything that has a connection and can be in the online world, they can target," he said. "They can be anywhere."

As Cushing and Jacobson continued reviewing victims' cases, they gathered an understanding of how CVLT operated and began creating a suspect list of usernames belonging to pre-

sumed leaders.

Tracking down the people behind the usernames proved challenging. Then, a breakthrough emerged halfway across the country.

::

The first-generation college freshman arrived in the quiet Midwestern college town of Ames, Iowa, hoping to escape the man who had blackmailed her online since she was 16. She blocked him and deleted her social media accounts, but he did not give up that easily.

He found her on a new account and threatened to release pornographic photos of her on the internet if she didn't comply with his demands, according to the Iowa State University Police Department.

Too afraid to tell her parents and unable to focus on her studies, she reported that she was harassed to the Iowa State University Police Department in November 2020.

The initial officer assigned to the case was stymied by the fake names, addresses and financial accounts the person used to conceal his identity.

But Kami Feld, a young officer with the university police department, could not get the case out of her mind and decided to try her hand at solving it.

She pored over piles of subpoenaed data linked to the person's online accounts before she found something useful — an instance in which the man had used his real information when transferring money from account to account.

"He just happened to slip up one time, and then I was able to use that slipup and then just start going down the rabbit hole," Feld told The Times.

Feld said she had found Borge, one of the four alleged key members of CVLT. In analyzing his subpoenaed data, she also found more than a dozen of his alleged victims and began sharing information with relevant law enforcement agencies.

This brought her in contact with Homeland Security Investigations, which had been working to identify Borge as part of its efforts to take down CVLT.

In August 2021, Feld and Homeland Security Investigations special agents trav-

eled to Hawaii and served a search warrant at Borge's home in rural Pahoa, bringing the officer face to face with the man she had dedicated months to hunting. She asked him how he had become so tech savvy.

"He just kind of bowed his head," said Feld, "and he said, 'Obviously not tech savvy enough, otherwise you wouldn't be here.'"

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Whereas Feld's dedication to the freshman's case helped lead to the indictment of Borge, three other women told The Times they felt their local police departments failed to take their reports seriously.

The girl recruited at 14, who had been previously groomed when she was 11, said that reporting her abuse to the police made her life worse.

A turning point came the night Rohan told her to hang herself in December 2019, she said. In the middle of her attempt to do so, her dog started to bark loudly, leading her parents to knock on her bedroom door. She aborted the suicide attempt.

In that moment, something seemed to click in her mind and she became defiant.

Rohan told her to drink bleach. She said no. He told her to have sex with her dog. She said no. He told her she'd regret it. She went to sleep.

In the morning she woke up to a set of horrifying text messages from her Girl Scout friends — "Is this you?"

Rohan had released the graphic photos and videos he had of her and they were rapidly spreading among her peers, she said. In a panic she called the detective who handled her earlier abuse case.

The results, she said, were disastrous. The detective accused her of failing to be safe on the internet, she said. The incident strained her parents' marriage as they grappled with guilt that their young daughter had now been groomed twice and fear that they could face legal trouble.

"A few months after this all happened, I tried to kill myself again," she said.

Since her second suicide attempt in February 2020, she has been in therapy for ongoing post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, night terrors and struggles with her self-worth, she said.

The 14-year-old victim said the detective assigned

764 and CVLT operate, so they can be better prepared to respond to victim cases.

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On Jan. 17, after more than four years of investigations led by Cushing, Jacobson, Villanueva and a coalition of national and international law enforcement partners, a federal indictment was filed against the four alleged key members of CVLT: Rane, Walker, Merritt and Borge.

They were each charged in the Central District of California with one count of engaging in a child exploitation enterprise. If convicted as charged they could face life in prison.

With CVLT now largely dismantled, federal law enforcement is focusing on 764, which is considered a domestic terrorist group. The 764 network's goals include social unrest and the downfall of the world order, according to the Department of Justice. This can be reflected in its efforts to encourage victims to commit suicide and other crimes, Ehsaei of the FBI said.

Bradley Cadenhead founded the group in 2021 when he was 15 years old, taking the name from the first three numbers of the ZIP Code of his hometown of Stephenville, Texas. He was sentenced to 80 years in prison on child pornography-related charges in 2023 and the group has since splintered into countless offshoot networks, according to the FBI.

764 is now colloquially used to describe a variety of violent online rings that engage in criminal conduct within the United States and abroad, according to the FBI. The FBI is investigating more than 350 subjects connected to the network. In California, alleged network members have been arrested in Downey, the San Fernando Valley, San Diego and Porterville.

One of the alleged leaders of 764, Baron Cain Martin, was charged in Arizona in October with 29 counts of participating in a child exploitation enterprise, producing child pornography, conspiring to provide material support to terrorists and crushing animals, among other offenses.

Assistant Atty. Gen. for National Security John A. Eisenberg called Martin's alleged actions as part of 764 "so depraved they defy comprehension."

"We will use every available tool to protect our children and ensure that those who perpetrate such acts of pure evil face the full force of justice," he said in a statement.

Ehsaei said that 764 networks have grown significantly in the last few years and that it's a top priority for the FBI. "We're trying to do everything we can to combat it," he said. The agency released a public safety announcement in March about these violent online networks.

Catharine Richmond, a former assistant U.S. attorney who worked on the case, said many of the victims "bear not only psychological but physical scars as well."

"Some of the physical scars even required medical intervention," she said. These groups "are growing in numbers and brutality. As adults, we need to better educate girls about these devastating online dangers and empower them with resources to avoid and report these groups."

The victim recruited at 15 said it is hard to stomach the ease with which 764 members continue to target young girls.

She may be called on to



Eric Thayer Los Angeles Times
 Karen Bass at a Proposition 50 rally last month. The measure was backed by 64.4% of voters.

Voices **GEORGE SKELTON** COLUMNIST CAPITOL JOURNAL

Another way Prop. 50 may help Democrats

Redistricting measure stirs voter enthusiasm, pollster says

SACRAMENTO Turns out Proposition 50 backed California Republicans with a double blow leading into the 2026 congressional elections. At, there was the reshaping of house districts aimed at five Republican-held Democrats. We learn that the pro-enthusiasm normally in a higher casting of all about the national or control of the U.S. of Representatives — and ss potentially exercising itutional duty to provide

some checks and balance against the president. Democrats need a net pickup of only three seats in November's elections to dethrone Republicans. President Trump is desperate to keep his GOP toadies in power. So, he has coerced — bullied and threatened — some red-state governors and legislatures into rejiggering Democratic-held House seats to make them more Republican-friendly. When Texas quickly obliged, Gov. Gavin Newsom retaliated with a California Democratic gerrymander aimed at neutralizing the Lone Star State's partisan mid-decade redistricting. California's counterpunch became Proposition 50, which was approved by a whopping

64.4% of the state's voters. Not only did Proposition 50 redraw some GOP-held House seats to tinge them blue, it stirred up excitement about the 2026 elections among Democratic voters. That's the view of Mark Baldassare, polling director for the nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California. And it makes sense. Umpteen millions of dollars were spent by Newsom and Proposition 50 backers advertising the evils of Trump and the need for Democrats to take over the House. A PPIC poll released last week showed a significant "enthusiasm gap" between Democratic and Republican voters [See Skelton, B5]

ing to restore an LGBTQ+ lifeline

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SMITH COLLECTION Gado/Getty Images

L.A. COUNTY would need U.S. approval to restore the "press 3" option for local callers to the 988 line.

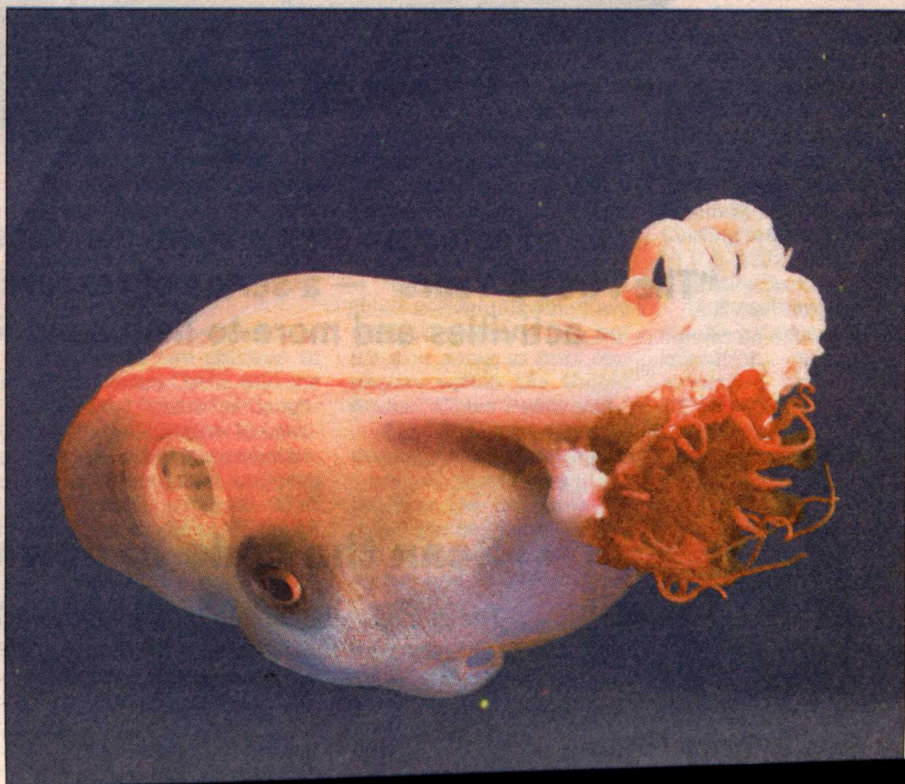
national 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline's "press 3" option, which previously connected LGBTQ+ youths with specially trained counselors. At the time, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, which funds the 988 hotline, said it would not "silo LGB+ youth services" but rather focus on serving all who are seeking help. Losing the "press 3" option has been devastating for youths struggling with mental health crises, emotional stress and suicidal [See Hotline, B4]

ey Bay scientists observe ant seven-arm octopus

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The last time these researchers spotted this type of "extraordinary octopus," the creature was also holding part of a jellyfish, which at the time helped scientists understand its surprising diet of gelatinous animals. "To be able to confirm our first observation with this new sighting was informative because this octopus was holding a different, deeper-living type of jellyfish than we'd seen before," said Steven Haddock, a senior scientist with the MBARI and a member of the team that observed the giant octopus Nov. 6. The video of the latest octopus was captured by a remotely operated vehicle at about 700 meters, or about 2,300 feet, below sea level. Scientifically, having

has eight arms, but males tend to keep their eighth, specialized arm — used for transferring sperm during mating — hidden, giving the appearance of only seven appendages, according to the MBARI. Female seven-arm octopuses are significantly larger than males, growing up to 13 feet long and weighting 165 pounds, MBARI experts reported. They mostly live in the ocean's twilight zone where light rarely reaches, typically considered 650 to 3,000 feet below the water's surface. "It was super exciting for me to see this species that I had only seen once before," Haddock said. "It is also interesting that this octopus is one of the



who was killed?

Pair who say they knew Maria De La Rosa from childhood are suspects in case.

BY MATTHEW ORMSETH AND RICHARD WINTON

Around 1:30 a.m. on a Saturday last month, two masked men approached a black Cadillac Escalade idling outside a Northridge apartment building. One held a shotgun, the other a handgun. A surveillance system captured the sounds of what happened next: A gang challenge, confusion, a demand for property. Then six shots and sounds of the Escalade speeding off. In the passenger seat was Maria De La Rosa, 22, with a gunshot wound to the chest. A musician who performed as DELAROSA, she had a growing following at the time of her death on Nov. 22. Authorities said De La Rosa was killed during a robbery but revealed little else about the case. The Times recently reviewed a search warrant affidavit written by

the Los Angeles Police Department detective who investigated the homicide. According to the document, De La Rosa was set up by her friends — two of three people now charged with her murder. Arrested the day after the homicide, Francisco "G Boy" Gaytan told police he'd known De La Rosa since they were teenagers, Det. Siranush Simonyan wrote in the affidavit. Gaytan said his friend, Benny "Player" Gomez, made plans to meet De La Rosa on Bryant Street for a "drug buy," but the plan was to rob the musician, the affidavit said. Gaytan, Gomez and the two alleged gunmen are from Bryant Street, a gang in Northridge, according to the affidavit. Gaytan claimed he took no part in the robbery, but after he consented to a search of his phone, Simonyan said she found text messages sent to one of the shooting suspects, Eduardo "Active" Lopez. "Go get ski mask," Gaytan allegedly told Lopez five hours before De La Rosa was killed. [See Musician, B4]

Newsom nervous about response to candid new book

BY DAKOTA SMITH AND MELODY GUTIERREZ

Gov. Gavin Newsom said he is nervous about the public response to his forthcoming autobiography's candid details about his life and those around him. "Just being honest — it comes with a cost," said Newsom, who made the rounds at a Democratic National Committee meeting in Los Angeles on Thursday. Newsom, who already acknowledged that he is considering a 2028 bid for president, said he didn't hold back in the book. His co-writer, former Los Angeles Times reporter Mark Arax, told the governor that he wouldn't be a part of the project unless Newsom was forthcoming. "And then you read stuff and [wonder], 'Oh, how's this going to read?'" said Newsom, who expects that conservative commentators will attack him over some

passages. "This is not a politician's book, it's not a book that you would expect me" to write, he said. "It's all out there." Many of the turbulent and personally traumatic chapters of the California politician's life are already well-documented. In 2007, Newsom, then mayor of San Francisco, acknowledged that he had an affair with the wife of a longtime aide. Newsom's mother, Tessie Newsom, ended her life in 2002 at age 55 through assisted suicide after a long fight with breast cancer. The governor has also talked about growing up watching his mother struggle to make ends meet, and how oil executive Gordon Getty and his wife, Ann, gave him experiences his parents could not afford, including an African safari when he was a teen. It's the third book for Newsom and comes at a pivot [See Newsom, B2]



MATEI HORVATH Getty Images

CANDLES adorn Rob Reiner's star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. He and his wife were found dead Sunday.

Reiner son faces murder charges in double slaying

He could get the death penalty or life in prison without parole if convicted.

BY JAMES QUEALLY,
RICHARD WINTON,
HANNAH FRY
AND GAVIN J. QUINTON

Los Angeles County prosecutors on Tuesday announced murder charges against Nick Reiner, days after his parents — Hollywood legend Rob Reiner and Michele Singer Reiner — were found stabbed inside their Brentwood home.

Prosecutors said they would file two counts of first-degree murder with special circumstances against Nick Reiner. Reiner, 32, also faces a special allegation that he used a deadly weapon, a knife, in the crime, L.A. County Dist. Atty. Nathan Hochman said during a news conference.

"This case is heartbreaking and deeply personal, not only for the Reiner family and their loved ones, but for our entire city," LAPD Chief Jim McDonnell said during the news conference.

With prosecutors alleg-

ing a special circumstance — that Nick Reiner committed multiple homicides — he could face a death sentence or life in prison without the possibility of parole if convicted. Prosecutors have not made a decision on whether to seek capital punishment. That review process can take months, and Hochman has yet to seek death in any case since restoring the office's pursuit of capital verdicts last year.

Los Angeles police responded to the Reiner home in the 200 block of Chadbourne Avenue about 3:40 p.m. Sunday after the couple's daughter found her parents with apparent stab wounds, law enforcement sources confirmed to The Times. Hours later, around 9:15 p.m., authorities caught up with Nick Reiner in Exposition Park near USC and took him into custody.

Reiner is being held without bail at Twin Towers Jail and is considered a suicide risk and was placed under special supervision, a law enforcement source told The Times. The source spoke on condition of anonymity in order to discuss the confidential matter.

Reiner was scheduled to [See Reiner, A8]

Bass rips response to fires in city, county

'Both sides botched it,' mayor says on podcast. Her remarks are later removed.

BY DAVID ZAHNISER

The setting looked almost cozy: Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass and a podcast host seated inside her home in two comfy chairs, talking about President Trump, ICE raids, public schools and the Palisades fire.

The recording session inside the library at Getty House, the official mayor's residence, lasted an hour. Once it ended, the two shook hands and the room broke into applause.

Then, the mayor kept talking — and let it rip.

Bass gave a blunt assessment of the emergency response to the Palisades and Eaton fires. "Both sides botched it," she said.

She didn't offer specifics on the Palisades. But on the Eaton fire, she pointed to the lack of evacuation alerts in west Altadena, where all but one of the 19 deaths occurred.

"They didn't tell people they were on fire," she said to Matt Welch, host of "The Fifth Column" podcast.

The mayor's informal remarks, which lasted around four minutes, came at the tail end of a 66-minute video added to "The Fifth Column's" YouTube channel last month. In recent weeks, it was replaced by a shorter, 62-minute version — one that omits her more free-wheeling final thoughts.

The exact date of the interview was not immediately clear. The video premiered on Nov. 25, according to the

Deep discounts on water for farmland

BY IAN JAMES

The water that flows down irrigation canals to some of the West's biggest expanses of farmland comes courtesy of the federal government for a very low price — even, in some cases, for free.

In a new study, researchers analyzed wholesale prices charged by the federal government in California, Arizona and Nevada, and found that large agricultural water agencies pay only a fraction of what cities pay, if anything at all. They said these "dirt-cheap" prices cost taxpayers, add to the strains on scarce water, and discourage conservation — even as the Colorado River's depleted reservoirs continue to decline.

"Federal taxpayers have been subsidi-

dizing effectively free water for a very, very long time," said Noah Garrison, a researcher at UCLA's Institute of the Environment and Sustainability. "We can't address the growing water scarcity in the West while we continue to give that water away for free or close to it."

The report, released last week by UCLA and the environmental group Natural Resources Defense Council, examines water that local agencies get from the Colorado River as well as rivers in California's Central Valley, and concludes that the federal government delivers them water at much lower prices than state water systems or other suppliers.

The researchers [See Water, A7]

When love can't cure addiction

Nick Reiner's drug use and mental illness may look familiar to many families.

BY CORINNE PURTILL

When Greg heard about the deaths of Rob and Michele Reiner, and the alleged involvement of their son Nick, the news struck a painfully familiar chord.

It wasn't the violence that resonated, but rather the heartache and desperation that come with loving a family member who suffers from an illness that the best efforts and intentions alone can't cure.

Greg has an adult child who, like Nick Reiner, has had a long and difficult struggle with addiction.

"It just rings close to home," said Greg, chair of Families Anonymous, a national support program for friends and family members of people with addiction. (In keeping with the organization's policy of anonymity for members, The Times is withholding Greg's last name.)

"It's just so horrible to be the parent or a loved one of

somebody that struggles with [addiction], because you can't make any sense of this," he said. "You can't find a way to help them."

Every family's experience is different, and the full picture is almost always more complicated than it appears from the outside. Public details about the Reiner family's private struggles are relatively few.

But some parts of their story are likely recognizable to the millions of U.S. families affected by addiction.

"This is really bringing to light something that's going on in homes across the country," said Emily Feinstein, executive vice president of the nonprofit Partnership to End Addiction.

Over the years, Nick Reiner, 32, and his parents publicly discussed his years-long struggle with drug use, which included periods of homelessness and multiple rehab stints.

Most recently, he was living in a guesthouse on his parents' Brentwood property. Family friends told The Times that Michele Singer Reiner had become increasingly concerned about Nick's mental health in recent weeks.

[See Addiction, A8]



YURI GRIPAS Abaca/Bloomberg

THE PRESIDENT'S chief of staff, Susie Wiles, attends a meeting last week.

Trump aide on defense

White House stands by Wiles as tell-all causes a stir

BY MICHAEL WILNER
AND ANA CEBALLOS

WASHINGTON — President Trump's chief of staff is defending herself after granting an extraordinarily candid series of interviews with Vanity Fair in which she offers stinging judgments of the president and blunt assessments about his admin-

sumed office, caused a scandal in Washington and prompted a crisis response from the White House that involved nearly every single figure in Trump's orbit issuing a public defense.

In 11 interviews conducted over lunches and meetings in the West Wing, Wiles described early failures and drug use by billionaire Elon Musk during his

Wiles also acknowledged that Trump had launched a retribution campaign against his perceived political enemies.

"I don't think he wakes up thinking about retribution," Wiles told Chris Whipple, the Vanity Fair writer who has written extensively on past chiefs of staff, "but when there's an opportunity, he will go for it."





MARCUS BAUTISTA pauses at a memorial for Rob Reiner at the Hollywood Walk of Fame on Tuesday. RONALDO BOLANOS Los Angeles Times

Voices STEVE LOPEZ COLUMNIST

Rob Reiner blazed trails. Trump wallowed in filth

Whether you sat across the table from him or across the aisle, Rob Reiner left no doubt about what he cared about and was willing to fight for. I had lunch with him once at Pete's Cafe in downtown Los Angeles, where he was far less interested in what was on his plate than what was on his mind. He was advocating for local investments in early childhood development programs, using funds from the tobacco tax created by Proposition 10 in 1998, which he

Hollywood icon's activism was driven by compassion. From the president, a grave dance.

helped spearhead. I remember thinking that although political activism among celebrities was nothing new, Reiner was well beyond the easier tasks of making endorsements and hosting fundraisers. He had an understanding of public policy failures and entrenched inequities, and he wanted to talk about the moral duty to address them and the financial benefits of doing so. "He was deeply passionate," said Ben Austin, who was at that lunch and worked as an aide to Reiner at [See Lopez, B2]

Body appearing to be missing hiker is found

21-year-old Joseph Brambila disappeared on Mt. Whitney a month ago

BY JACK DOLAN

The Inyo County Sheriff's Office announced Monday it had recovered the body of a young male hiker that fits the description of Joseph Brambila, who disappeared on Mt. Whitney in early November. Brambila, 21, has been the subject of searches in the last month, and his family waged a desperate campaign on social media asking

for help finding him. The body was removed from the 99 Switchbacks area high on the mountain — the tallest in the United States outside of Alaska — by helicopter Monday, according to Lindsey Stine, the Sheriff's Office spokeswoman. Hikers had spotted the body, but previous attempts to find and recover it were stymied by heavy snow. Searches from the air by helicopter and on the

ground with a cadaver dog were unsuccessful, and it was feared the remains might not be recovered until the spring thaw. Brambila's disappearance was the focus of a Times article last week. Interviews with people close to him and hikers who met him on the trail and his self-shot YouTube videos painted a picture of a funny, self-deprecating young man from southeast Los Angeles County who still was learn-

ing his way in the mountains, which he had grown to love. A video from an aborted attempt to climb Mt. Whitney in April 2024 began with Brambila chiding himself for forgetting his trekking poles in the car. Then he went over a gear checklist posted at the trailhead: emergency blanket, first aid kit, headlamp and extra batteries, map and compass. He tapped each [See Hiker, B4]

Jewish family's home, decorated for Hanukkah, is attacked

BY SALVADOR HERNANDEZ

Police are investigating a possible hate crime after someone driving past a Jewish family's home in Redlands fired several shots and yelled antisemitic slurs, police said. The attack on the home, which had been decorated

person for the Police Department said that no suspects have been arrested or identified and that the investigation continues. Rodgir Cohen, a professor of political science, religion and psychology, said he and his family had just returned from Shabbat dinner. The family had walked inside their home, but he and his son were headed back to the car after realiz-

Redlands police are investigating a possible hate crime in which someone yelled antisemitic slurs and appeared to have fired an airsoft handgun.



State could see heavy rainfall and snow at Christmastime

Weather center warns of flood and landslide risks and some tough travel conditions.

BY RONG-GONG LIN II

Big rain and snow could hit California around Christmas, ending a long dry spell for the state.

There's a high risk for heavy rainfall along the entire California coast between Dec. 23 and Christmas Day, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center said. There's also a high risk of heavy snow along the Sierra Nevada.

The rains would be fueled by atmospheric river storms, which pounded the Pacific Northwest this month, causing flooding and evacuations.

The Climate Prediction Center warned of possible flooding, landslides and difficult travel conditions over mountain passes. Those at risk include recently burned areas, which could see rapid flows of mud and debris. High winds and heavy rainfall or snowfall could result in power outages, officials said.

"Pretty much all the ensemble projections bring widespread rain sometime

in the Dec. 23-26 window, which will certainly bring impacts to the busy Christmas holiday," said the National Weather Service in Oxnard, which issues forecasts for Los Angeles County.

The most likely outcome for Los Angeles, Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties is "high amounts of rain" — 2 to 4 inches on the coast and in the valleys, and 4 to 8 inches in the mountains and foothills. There's a 40% chance of that much rain falling in those four days.

There's also a 30% chance of "moderate amounts of rain" — 1 to 2 inches on the coast and in the valleys — and a 10% chance of "very high amounts of rain," totaling 4 or more inches.

Things could change, "but if nothing else, be prepared for at least some rain around Christmas," the weather service said.

But until then, conditions should remain dry through the current week, with warmer-than-usual temperatures across the Southland. High temperatures are expected to hover between 75 and 85 degrees through the workweek, which is 10 to 20 degrees above normal, the weather service office in Oxnard said. Winds in Southern Cali-

[See Weather, B5]

State sues federal agencies over EV charger network

Administration refuses to approve money for grant programs passed by Congress, suit says.

BY HAYLEY SMITH

California has filed its 50th lawsuit against the Trump administration this year — this time over the suspension of federal fund-

ing for electric vehicle charging infrastructure, state officials announced Tuesday.

The U.S. Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration allegedly have refused to approve any new funding for two grant programs created under President Biden, the Charging and Fueling Infrastructure program and the Electric Vehicle Charger Reliability and Accessibility Accelerator program, since this spring, according to the lawsuit filed in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington state. The programs were intended to build, repair and maintain electric vehicle chargers.

The U.S. EV charging network continues to expand. California has more than 201,000 public EV charging ports, compared with about 120,000 gasoline nozzles statewide, according to state data. But to address climate change, it needs more.

The lawsuit says the Trump administration's actions violate the constitutional separation of powers